

### Living Like Christmas

*God's Kingdom will flourish when Christians live like Jesus*

.....**Colossians 3: 12 – 17**.....  
*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. <sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”* .....

.....**Luke 13: 18 – 21**.....  
*“Then Jesus asked, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? <sup>19</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and become a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.’ <sup>20</sup>Again he asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? <sup>21</sup> It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.’”*.....

There are some things about Christmas that I wish would last all year. One of those things is the kindness that people show each another. In the days surrounding Christmas, it’s heart-warming to see people reach out to neighbors and even strangers in ways they don’t normally do the rest of the year.

We can pray that the ‘warmth’ of Christmas will stay. We can pray that the divisiveness among us will end. But we can do even something more. We can pray that the spirit of Christmas will be obvious in our lives all the other 364 days of the year.

What is it that makes Christmastime so special? ‘Hallmark’ would like us to believe that ‘kindness’ just floats in the air at Christmas time. But Christians know that the love of God the Father and His Son and the Holy Spirit is what inspires true ‘goodwill’.

Our two scripture readings today remind us that it *is* possible to live like Christmas every day if we ‘clothe’ ourselves with ‘**compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience**’ and live by the power of **God’s Kingdom** within us.

In his other letters, Paul calls this ‘**putting on Christ.**’ (*Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24*) ‘**Putting on Jesus**’ is more than just switching our wardrobe. It involves more than just using willpower, like we would to keep a New Year’s Resolution.

We ‘**clothe**’ our self with Christ by asking him to be in charge of our life as our ‘**Lord**’. When we do this, Jesus makes us ‘**new creations**’, and we become ‘**joined**’ to him. (*2 Corinthians 5:17*) Jesus then sends the Holy Spirit into our heart and soul to begin the process of transforming our behavior to become more and more like his.

Paul promised that when we trade the **'old'** sinful nature we were born with for the **'new'** nature that Jesus gives us, we are **'born again'** and we begin to act like Jesus.

The more we let God's Holy Spirit shape us, the more people are able to see God through us. Our goals in life begin to change. Out of gratitude for the love and mercy He has blessed us with, we want to please Him in everything.

Paul addressed his letter to **'God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved'**. How do we know if we are one of these people? In our Reformed Protestant faith, we believe that God **'chooses'** to whom to give the gift of faith.

If you believe that Jesus is the only way to eternal life, then you can be assured that God has **chosen** you, because no one can believe in Jesus unless God has given him or her the gift of faith to believe.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians, that faith is not something we muster up on our own. **'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—'** (Ephesians 2:8)

The miracle of God's grace is that once we accept Jesus' salvation, God sends the Holy Spirit to us, to dress us in our new spiritual clothing. As we allow Him, the Holy Spirit wraps us in spiritual **'armor'**, to protect us from the pull of our **'old nature'** and the powers of **'darkness.'** (Ephesians 6: 10 – 12)

As we get used to wearing our **'new clothes,'** we realize that our attitudes are changing. Do you know the feeling? We start to view life, all of it, from God's perspective. We see things through God's eyes, which is best described as **'love.'**

When someone hurts us, offends us, slanders us; rejects us, we begin to realize that God loves them too. The Holy Spirit shows us how to weather personal attacks and He helps us to respond in such a way that furthers God's purpose in their life.

For this reason, Paul appeals to the church members to **'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.'**

I know from personal experience that this certainly is not an easy or instantaneous thing! Some days we can be going along so well, and then, **'bam'**, we get blindsided. Someone **'wrongs'** us, and our **'Jesus clothes'** are suddenly nowhere to be found. It's easy to feel offended and want to retaliate. Some days require a **lot** of prayer. The **'renewing'** that God brings to our minds and hearts, however, makes every one of our struggles, worth it. (Romans 12:2)

Forgiveness is a process that is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It requires every ounce of God's armor to fight these battles.

When we remember all that Jesus has forgiven us of, we realize that as God's people, we have no grounds to hold anything against anyone else. Families and churches are divided over many issues right now. But we can do our part in the unique situations we live in.

When our neighbors see Christians **'bearing with'** each other **'in love'**, God and Jesus are glorified and noticed in our communities. When we Christians begin forgiving like Jesus has forgiven us, God's love will revolutionize the world.

God's plan to bring His peace to the world, begins with His Kingdom that he '*plants*' in everyone who belongs to Jesus. Not an earthly kingdom, God's Kingdom expands throughout the world through individual hearts where the '*word of Christ*', '*dwells*'.

As more and more people live by the power of God, God's Kingdom grows, spreading the presence of God wherever they are. While most people think of a 'kingdom' as a mighty political power, God's Kingdom is powerful in a different way.

It begins in a person's soul and then grows in surprising ways into something far larger and greater than expected. Jesus compared the Kingdom to a tiny mustard seed (*slide* ) that grows into a tree, (although technically a 'bush'), large enough to shelter any who come to it. (*Matthew 13:31-32*)

In the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament, God described the Kingdom that He would one day build in the same way. God said it would be like a tree, that '*birds of every kind*' would come and '*find shelter*' in its branches. (*Ezekiel 17:23*) (*slide* )

As unnerving as the thought of '*growing*' a tree inside of you might be, the analogy of growing a world-wide community of believers which is a haven for all who are seeking God, does sound wonderful, doesn't it?

Jesus used another analogy to help us picture how God's Kingdom grows. He said, '*It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.*' (*slide* )

This '*yeast*' is an analogy for the presence of God, which causes a person, a church, a community, and the world, to '*expand*' and demonstrate the glory and blessings of God.

Which do you want your life to be like? Do you want to be like this dough that seems pretty flat and life-less, or would you rather be like this risen dough, full of promise? (*show two different breads*)

In this time, as members of our culture, and as God's 'chosen people', how we live out our lives does matter to God. (*slide* )

It can get confusing to know what God values, because there seem to be so many voices competing for our loyalty. It is hard to know who to trust, and people tend to let us down, or say one thing but do another.

The best way I know of to know what God wants from us, is to go to God's Word in the Bible. True, the Scripture doesn't always speak to our particular situation, but by knowing what Jesus did or taught, we can get a pretty good clue. Our first step is to do as Paul suggested, '*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.*'

The next step is to ask God what He wants us to do. Remember the slogan, '*WWJD?*' ('*What Would Jesus Do?*') If we truly want to live into the 'new creation' that God wants us to become, we need to make it a practice to follow Jesus.

Following Jesus, we learn to listen to God's voice, and trust Him, instead of relying only on those who want to interpret what God says for us.

This is not to say that we shouldn't listen to Godly counsel, but even Paul advised his audiences to **'test everything'** he told them, according to God's Word. (*1 Thessalonians 5:21*) John also cautioned the same thing, because **'many false prophets have gone out into the world.'** (*1 John 4:1*)

How will we know the difference between God's Truth and the counterfeit? The answer is so fabulous! God's Holy Spirit, Whom God has sent to live in us, will **'guide us into all truth.'** (*John 16:13*)

If we truly want to **'Live Like Christmas'** every day, we will cooperate with God's Spirit, so that in everything we do, **'whether in word or deed'**, we will **'do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus'**.

How will our lives change if we make it our resolution to live like Jesus did, and make it a priority to honor God and serve the interests of God's Kingdom even at our own expense?

Do you think people would wonder why we are kinder? Will they notice that we are more forgiving? Gentler? More patient? What difference will we make in our families, neighborhood, church, workplace, if everything that we say or do glorifies God in the same way Jesus did?

I don't know about you, but I can hardly wait to find out!

By the power of God, to the glory of God, everyday **can** be like Christmas. Amen.